

Effect of Leadership Style on the Management of Conflict in Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife of South-Western Nigeria

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Abstract

The study assessed the effect of leadership style on the management of conflict in Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife of South-western Nigeria with a view to identifying the causes of conflict and leadership styles for handling conflict in Nigerian universities. This was necessitated by the need to have functional leadership traits on the management of conflict in Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife of South-western Nigeria in particular and Nigerian Universities in general.

Both primary and secondary sources of data were utilized for the study. The Primary sources of data were collected through questionnaires and personal interview. Secondary sources of data were collected from relevant journals, books, internet sources and lecture notes delivered on the field conflict management.

Two former vice chancellors were examined as regards the problem of perennial crisis in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. Respondents were asked to rate the two former vice chancellors using their organisational competence, leadership style and positive relation with staff and students

as rating criteria. The questionnaires were analysed using descriptive analysis such as scores and percentage.

The study discovered evidences of mismanagement of conflict which made most conflicts in the universities violent. It observed that most conflict in Nigerian universities might have been averted if the leadership in Nigerian universities could be more democratic, sensitive, and flexible in conflict periods.

The study concluded that the welfare of staff and students should be given more attention if perennial conflicts with school management are to be overcome in Nigerian universities.

Keywords: Conflict Management, Crisis Resolution, Leadership Traits, Styles.

Introduction

Background to the Study

Conflict functions where there are two or more persons in a group and where the managers have to deal with people lives, ego and sense of mission or purpose. No human organization is immune to conflicts. Nigerian universities as a social organization do experience conflicts between different unions within its jurisdiction. Conflict is therefore an inevitable phenomenon in any organization (Adebayo, 2009).

Recent social political uncertainties coupled with the typical institution problems in Nigeria as a whole have been the bane of the crises in the Nigeria Universities. Evidences abound to show that since the advent of military government in Nigeria in January, 1966 there have been series or disagreement between the government and the university management owing largely subtle incursion into the autonomy of the latter by the former. (Olaiya, 2000).

In the foregoing, the universities have continued to exist and operate under a lot of restrictions and encroachments from the state which in turn form the bedrock of the mounting conflict in most Nigerian universities.

Similarly, these various crises often centre on the issue of deprivation of rights and the neglect of staff and student welfare among others (Olaiya, *ibid*).

Therefore, this study assessed the effect of leadership style on the management of conflict in Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife of South-western Nigeria

Statement of the Problem

Conflict which degenerate into violence in most cases have become regular features between staffs, students and management in Nigerian universities.

Going down the memory lane, one observes that almost all universities in Nigeria witnessed unrest at one time or the other. Since 1948, when the premier university (now University of Ibadan) was established problem of violent protests have been assuming a spiralling increase (Olaiya, 2008:9).

Madunagu (1980) listed twenty-one major students' crises in Nigeria between 1948 and 1979.

Several others have been taken place since 1979 and the latest of which was the Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) crisis in 2013 to early 2014.

A number of steps had been taken by these vice chancellors to reduce the frequency of conflicts in Nigerian Universities. Some employed democratic leadership style, some employed laissez-faire leadership style and others autocratic leadership style.

It is against these background problems that this study sets out to assess the effect of leadership style on the management of conflict in Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife of South-western Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to

- i. assess the effect of leadership on the management of conflict in Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife of South-western Nigeria.
- ii. identify the causes of conflict in Nigerian universities.

- iii. examine the leadership styles for handling conflict in Nigerian universities : and
- iv. recommend solutions to ameliorate the incidence of conflict in Nigerian Universities.

Significance of the study

The study is significant because it will guide the government in policy decision regarding conflict management and resolution in Nigeria Universities. The university governing council and administration is expected to benefit immensely from the findings of the study as they will be afforded a better understanding of the enabling factors of conflict in their universities and integrate these towards the formulation of policies of conflict resolution.

Moreover, this study will contribute very useful contribution to modern literature on higher education administration, university leadership and conflict management analysis.

Literature Review

Conflict is a natural phenomenon and its occurrence in communities where human beings exist is inevitable. Conflict is also an inherent feature that cannot be underrated in every organization. This is because it can make or mar the survival, growth and progress of an organization (Adegoroye, 2004:1).

Coser (1964) defined conflict as “a struggle over values and claims to scarce resources, power and status in which the aims of opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate rivals”.

In this vein, conflict has been further described as phenomenon of opposition,

disagreement or a struggle between people with different ideas or belief. A general form of conflict can also be seen as arising from disputes or disagreement or contest over limited resources or interests, which are dissappropriately distributed or served; or as struggle for self-recognition, emancipation and autonomy and such other cases that could be set the interests of an individual or group of individuals against each other cases that could set the interest of an individual or group of individuals against each other (Olaiya, ibid).

Sanda (1991) asserted that conflict has been seen in the most extreme terms of “acute stress” anxiety or chronic tension or “death for a diseased person, social system or historical process. He also stressed that crisis management in universities demands appropriate leadership style of the school administrator or chief executive.

Bloisi (2007) opined that conflict is a disagreement between two or more parties who perceive that they have incompatible concerns. To him, individuals, groups, departments, organizations, countries etc. do experience conflict whenever an action by one party is perceived as preventing or interfering with the goals, needs or actions of another.

Hiss (1992) contended that conflict, like sex, is an essential creative element in human relationships. It is the means to a change, the means by which our social values of welfare, security, justice and opportunity for personal development can be achieved.

Conflicts in the Nigerian Universities

Conflicts have made management of universities in Nigeria to be the spotlight

throughout the country. Universities conflicts in Nigeria are a phenomenon of great concern. The chaotic situation has undermined many programmes aimed at enhancing the impartation of knowledge and skills in the future human resources for the country (Fatile and Adejuwon, 2011).

Adeyemi et al (2010) observed that crisis is becoming more rampant in the universities and the resultant consequence has been to the detriment of the administration, teaching – learning atmosphere.

Gboyega (1997) agreed that crisis continues to escalate in the university due to government and institutional authorities' management inefficiency. He argued further that since most of the crises of students are demand-bearing traditional authority of the university, tampering with the academic freedom of university, overt favouritism on the part of the school authority towards centre interest group etc. are less likely to foster any useful solution.

Mial et. al. (1960) grouped the roots of conflicts into five major types which are:

- (a) Differences in people's background;
- (b) Differences in values, ideals, objectives and religion;
- (c) Differences in age;
- (d) Differences in interest; and
- (e) Differences growing out of power structure.

According to Agbonna et. al. (2009), many unresolved conflicts in Nigerian universities are the crises of unsettled industrial agreement between the Federal Government and the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities (ASSU).

Adeyemi et. al. (2010) noted the causes students' crises in tertiary institutions, include wide communication gap between the students and the school authority; delay meeting students' demand by the school authority to guarantee security of lives and properties; inadequate facilities such as lecture rooms, laboratories and equipment; drastic and obnoxious rules and regulations; students reaction to harsh government policies; frustration and uncertainty from the larger society; academic stress; students' non-involvements in decisions that concern their welfare; student being forced to pay a special fee etc.

Religious fundamentalism and ethnicity have become major causes of conflicts in Nigerian institutions (Uwazie, Albert & Uzoigwe, 1999). They further stated that these two have resulted in protracted disharmony in Nigerian Universities.

Leadership Styles for Handling Conflict in Nigerian Universities

Follet (2001) pointed out three main ways of dealing with conflict: domination, compromise and integration. To her, other ways of handling conflict in organizations included avoidance and suppression.

Thomas (2000) considered the intention of a party (cooperatives i.e. attempting to satisfy the other party's concerns and assertiveness i.e., attempting to satisfy one own concerns) to be of importance when classifying the modes of handling conflict.

According to Prutt and Carnevale (2000), dual – concern mode (concern for self and concern for others) are four leadership styles of handing conflict. They are: yielding, problem solving inaction and contending.

Mohr and Spekman (2004) advocated for six techniques: (1) Joints problem solving (2) smoothing (3) persuasion, (4) domination (5) withdrawal and (6) arbitration.

Magugula (2007) articulated three styles of handling peaceful crisis resolution among warring parties: mediation, arbitration and reconciliation. He argued further that each of the approaches could be used by universities to resolve conflict among the between aggrieved parties.

Ojo (2006) listed various ways of crisis resolution as problem – solving; prevention and avoidance’ expansion of opportunities and the behaviour of people involved in conflict through conscious appeal; behaviour modification better communication; reduction of mistrust through dialogue and improved human relation; changing the structure of the organization and compromise and agreement style.

Aluede (2001) recommended among other things greater involvement of students in decision -making processes as a way of reducing conflict in Nigeria Universities.

Olaiya (ibid) compared the leadership styles of two former Vice Chancellors of Obafemi Awolowo University (Professor Wande Abimbola and Professor Wale Omole). He argued that Abimbola used democratic style of leadership while Omole employed autocratic style of leadership. This he stressed contributed to Prof. Abimbola’s unanimous selection for a second term of office as Vice Chancellor of Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife of South-western Nigeria.

Methodology

The study was carried out in Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife of South-western Nigeria. The University was founded in 1962 .It is one of the beautiful universities in Africa. The background to conflict in the university started when in 1973 when students of Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife in collaboration with other universities protested against Gowon led Federal Government monthly token pay of #30 to National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) members. Since then conflicts have become rampant in Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife of South-western Nigeria in particular and Nigerian Universities in general.

Research Design were used to ask questions from respondents on organisation competence, positive relation with students and staffs, leadership style, record in management of conflict and overall performances of the two former vice chancellors.

Moreover, the questionnaires were administered using structured questionnaires and analysed by the use of descriptive analysis such as scores and percentages.

Analysis, Interpretation and Discussion of Research Findings from Questionnaires on the Effect of Leadership on the Management of Conflict in Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife of South-western Nigeria

Respondents were asked to rate the two former vice chancellors who have presided over the university between 1982 -1989 and 1991-1999 using these criteria; organisational competence and positive

relation with staffs and students. The respondents were asked to use the 'high', 'average', 'low', and no response.

Similarly, respondents were asked to assess the leadership style of the two former vice chancellors using the 'democratic', 'autocratic', 'laissez-faire' and 'no response' rating criteria.

They were also asked to assess two former vice chancellors regarding their record in conflict management using 'best', 'average', 'worst' and 'no response' criteria.

Lastly, respondents were asked to assess the overall performance of vice chancellors as regarding welfare and condition of staffs and students using 'high', 'average', 'low', and 'no response' rating criteria scale. The need for 'no response' provision became necessary on the realisation that conflict discussion always carries with it a note of neutrality and biases.

Summaries of the responses are provided in Table 1 and 2 below.

Table 1: Assessment Scores of Professor Wande Abimbola's Leadership Style

Indices	Score	%	Score	%	Score	%	Score	%	Total (%)
Organisational Competition	High	72.5	Average	20.0	Low	29.5	NR	0	99
Positive Relation with Students & Staffs	High	72.5	Average	19.0	Low	93.5	NR	40	99
Leadership Style	Democratic	79.5	Autocratic	29	Laissezfaire	0	NR	15	99
Record in Management of Conflicts	Best	68.5	Average	16	Worst	0	NR	3.0	99
Overall Performance Appraisal	High	80.0	Average	32	Low	0.5	NR	6.5	99

Note NR implies No Response, meaning that the respondents did not respond to the question asked.

Table 2: Assessment Scores of Professor Wale Omole's Leadership Style

Indices	Score	%	Score	%	Score	%	Score	%	Total (%)
Organisational Competition	High	58.5	Average	8	Low	29.5	NR	3.0	99
Positive Relation with Students & Staffs	High	0.5	Average	1.5	Low	93.5	NR	4.5	99
Leadership Style	Democratic	0.5	Autocrat-ic	92.5	Laissezfaire	0	NR	6.0	99
Record in Management of Conflicts	Best	0.5	Average	0	Worst	94.5	NR	4.0	99
Overall performance Appraisal	High	20.0	Average	0	Low	72.0	NR	7.0	99

Note NR implies No Response, meaning that the respondents did not respond to the question asked

Discussion of the Research Findings on Questionnaires and Oral Interview

(a) Organisational Competence

The result from Table 1 showed that Professor Wande Abimbola had the highest score 72% of the total respondents. Interview responses also revealed that Prof Abimbola is a renowned strategist in times of conflict management. According responses from oral interview, he was said

to be present among the protesters largely to prevent arbitrary arson and above all to forestall police brutality of students and members of staff. Research evidence showed that he explored dialogue to a large extent. This explained his unanimous selection for a second term as vice chancellor of Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife of South-western Nigeria.

The result of table two showed that Professor Wale Omole scored 58.5%. Personal interview responses regarding his tenure are not impressive.

(b) Positive Relation with Students and Members of Staff

According to table 1, Prof Abimbola scored higher than Professor Omole. He scored 72.5% while Omole scored 0.5%. This attested to the fact that Prof Abimbola was more accessible and attentive than Professor Omole.

Interview evidences further showed that Abimbola is more accessible and sensitive to the problems of his subjects than Omole.

(c) Leadership Style

The findings revealed that Prof Abimbola was rated high (i.e. 68.5%) while Prof Omole was rated low (i.e. 0.5%). This showed that Abimbola was a democratic leader while Omole was an autocratic leader.

In the end, the respondents seemed to agree that the leadership style of Vice Chancellor is an important factor to reckon with in the management of and resolution of conflicts in Obafemi Awolowo University South-western Nigeria in particular and Nigerian Universities in general.

Conclusions

Based on the empirical findings of this study, it was established that there are many causes of conflict in Nigerian universities. For instance management inefficiency, autocratic leadership style, ethnicity, religious sentiment, unresolved grievances, greediness, wide communication gap between the students and management, drastic and obnoxious rules and regulations, inadequate facilities, insecurities of lives and properties etc. constitute hindrances to conflict resolution in Nigerian universities.

Moreover, it also discovered from the responses of the respondents that the vice chancellors should employ democratic leadership style in managing conflict in Nigerian Universities. This will ensure them crisis free tenure and their unanimous selection for second terms as presented in table 1 and 2 of this study where a former vice chancellor of Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife, Professor Abimbola was scored 72.5% in democratic leadership style.

Finally, the welfare and aspiration of the staffs and students deserve more attention. A perennial conflict with school authority is to be overcome in Nigerian universities.

Recommendations

From the findings of the study, these following recommendations are inferable:

1. There should be open and timely communication between the leaders and the led.
2. School authorities should be more democratic in handling staffs and students' affairs.
3. Vice chancellor should persuade and dialogue with aggrieved parties.
4. When conflict arises, management should focus more on preventive strategies in order to reduce crisis in schools rather than curative measures.
5. Decision making should be collective when possible.
6. Furthermore, government should provide essential services and revitalize the existing ones in our various universities.
7. Finally, students should always exercise caution and restraint to adopt

confrontational approach to issues that could have been handled through consultation.

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